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REPORT  
No. 228

## STUDY OF THE HEALTH OF WORLD WAR II PRISONERS OF WAR

MARCH 13, 1951.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the  
State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. RANKIN, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs submitted  
the following

### REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 304]

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 304) to provide for a study of the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II, having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the bill do pass.

#### EXPLANATION OF THE BILL

This bill provides for a study of the mental and physical results of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II. The study will be conducted under the supervision of the War Claims Commission with the assistance of the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs and other agencies of the Government, such as the Public Health Service and Surgeons General of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, or by contract with private medical research organizations. The actual research would not be done by the War Claims Commission, but it would be done by the agencies indicated, since such agencies already have medical staffs competent to perform such research.

The study would be primarily directed toward the development of procedures and standards to be applied in the diagnosis of mental and physical ailments of former prisoners of war; the life expectancy of such prisoners; determination as to whether or not there is evidence to sustain a conclusive presumption of service connection in favor of such prisoners for the purpose of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities; and creation of standards to be applied for the evaluation of claims of both civilian and military personnel, based upon the

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physical and mental sequelae of their imprisonment in the event such claims are later made compensable.

A subcommittee of this committee held full hearings during the Eighty-first Congress on the proposal and heard testimony from the Veterans' Administration, War Claims Commission, Public Health Service, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Disabled American Veterans, together with representatives of agencies devoted primarily to the welfare of these former prisoners of war. This bill was passed by the House during the Eighty-first Congress and favorably reported by the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, but was not considered by the Senate due to lack of time during the closing days of the Eighty-first Congress.

The subcommittee, after hearing officials of these organizations, unanimously approved the proposal and recommended favorable action to the full committee. The committee believes that adequate authority already exists for the conduct of such an investigation but at the same time it wishes to strongly emphasize that such a study will not be made unless this bill or legislation of a similar type is enacted into law. The War Claims Commission will serve as the over-all coordinating agency for this study, and the committee is of the firm opinion that the results of this study would be helpful to the Veterans' Administration in evaluating future claims from these men, as well as to the armed services in the development of procedures for aiding the rehabilitation of former prisoners of war. In addition, the potential contribution to medical science and research would be considerable, as is indicated by statements of members of the medical profession who themselves were prisoners of war.

The total cost of this study, if approved, would not exceed \$75,000, which seems to the committee to be a very modest sum in view of the results that may logically be expected from this research.

The reports of the War Claims Commission, the Public Health Service, the Department of Labor, and the Veterans' Administration, follow:

WAR CLAIMS COMMISSION,  
Washington 25, D. C., March 1, 1951.

Hon. JOHN E. RANKIN,  
*Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,*  
*House of Representatives, Washington 25, D. C.*

MY DEAR MR. RANKIN: Further reference is made to your letter of January 13, 1951, requesting a report by the War Claims Commission on H. R. 304, Eighty-second Congress, a bill to provide for a study of the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II.

The purpose of the bill is to authorize and direct the War Claims Commission, in cooperation with the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, to inquire into and report to the Congress concerning the aftereffects of malnutrition and imprisonment sustained by members of the Armed Forces of the United States and civilian American citizens who were imprisoned by enemies of the United States during World War II. The War Claims Commission would be directed to make all necessary arrangements (including contracts, agreements, etc.) for the conduct of research activities for the purpose of determining (1) the procedure and standards to be applied in the diagnosis of mental and physical condition of former prisoners of war; (2) the life expectancy of former prisoners of war; (3) whether there is evidence to sustain a conclusive presumption of service connection in favor of former prisoners of war for purposes of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities; and (4) standards to be applied for the evaluation of claims of American civilian and military personnel, based upon the physical and mental aftereffects of the conditions of their imprisonment, in the event such claims are later made compensable.

H. R. 304 is identical with H. R. 8348, Eighty-first Congress, on which the War Claims Commission furnished a report to your committee under date of August 9, 1950.

Pursuant to the provisions of section 8 of the War Claims Act of 1948 (Public Law 896, 80th Cong., July 3, 1948; 62 Stat. 1240), as amended (50 U.S.C. App. 2001-2013), the War Claims Commission conducted a survey of certain war claims arising out of World War II. The Commission's report was submitted to the President on March 31, 1950, and was transmitted by the President to the Congress on May 3, 1950. In that report (H. Doc. No. 580, 81st Cong.), the War Claims Commission referred to the insufficiency of the time allowed for the completion of a full and comprehensive study. The President in his message of May 3, 1950, transmitting the Commission's report to the Congress, emphasized the inadequacy of the time allowed for the preparation of the report. The President recommended at that time that a more comprehensive analysis of war claims arising out of World War II be conducted.

The Commission's report also discloses that during the course of the study many cases of mental and physical disability were reported by former prisoners of war, both military and civilian, which may be ascribed to malnutrition and other hardships of their imprisonment by the enemy. According to information furnished to the Commission, it is the almost unanimous view of medical personnel, who were themselves prisoners of war, that the after effects of imprisonment are to a degree almost universal among former war prisoners and that medical science is presently unprepared to cope with the problems presented.

Further documentation of the conditions of imprisonment, as cited in the aforementioned report, by the Department of State and the Department of the Army, discloses that such conditions as existed during World War II were unprecedented and may be characterized as atrocities.

On the basis of the evidence described above, the War Claims Commission specifically recommended in the afore-mentioned report of March 31, 1950, that legislation be enacted which would accomplish the purposes encompassed by H. R. 304, Eighty-second Congress.

It appears to the War Claims Commission that the enactment of the subject bill is especially desirable in view of the recommendation in part VII of House Document No. 580, Eighty-first Congress, that the Commission be authorized to receive and adjudicate the claims of former war prisoners and their survivors based on injuries, disabilities, and death resulting from their imprisonment. The bill would provide for the delineation of certain basic standards for evaluating such claims which the Commission deems to be particularly meritorious.

Moreover, it is the view of the War Claims Commission that basic humanitarian concepts dictate that an inquiry of the type provided by this bill be conducted. Although it is unlikely that any universal panacea will be discovered to provide for the complete rehabilitation of persons who suffered so much from imprisonment, the Commission considers that every effort should be made to provide, as soon as possible, for the alleviation of their severe sufferings. The knowledge that will result from the inquiry contemplated by the bill will certainly serve to assist those who have survived the hardships of enemy prison camps.

Not only would a study, such as that proposed by H. R. 304, aid those persons imprisoned during World War II, but it would also serve to avoid suffering by those persons who may be held as prisoners of war now or at some future time. In this connection, the War Claims Commission has been advised that the United Nations has information which would indicate that members of the Armed Forces of the United States, serving with the United Nations, and who have been taken as prisoners of war, have suffered as a result of mistreatment by the Government of North Korea. Furthermore, such a study of the after effects of malnutrition would serve to improve the care of civilian victims of malnutrition.

On June 1 and 2, 1950, there was conducted at the University of Minnesota a Conference on the Residues of Nutritional Insult. The internationally recognized experts on nutrition who participated in that conference gave serious consideration to the related problems of former war prisoners. On the basis of the discussion conducted and the findings of the conferees, recommendations were drafted concerning necessary future steps to be undertaken in the field of nutritional insult. Among the tentative recommendations of the conference is one calling for a study of the type provided for by this bill.

In the course of the preparation of the report of the War Claims Commission concerning certain war claims arising out of World War II, the Commission has enjoyed the active cooperation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs of the Canadian Government. That Department has attempted to conduct a study of

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the type contemplated by the bill, but has been handicapped statistically by the small sample of former prisoners of war available for investigation. That Department has urged that the War Claims Commission conduct a study similar to the one proposed by H. R. 304, Eighty-second Congress, and has offered full cooperation in the conduct of such an inquiry.

Thus, it would appear that independent of the investigation conducted by the War Claims Commission in connection with its report required by section 8 of the War Claims Act of 1948, as amended, it is agreed by those conversant with the problem that a thorough study should be made of the aftereffects of imprisonment sustained by members of the Armed Forces of the United States and civilian American citizens.

There is no information presently available to the Commission on which to base a definite statement as to the exact cost of the bill if enacted.

In view of the foregoing, the War Claims Commission strongly recommends favorable consideration of H. R. 304, Eighty-second Congress, by the committee.

Due to the urgent request of the committee for a report on this measure, there has not been sufficient time in which to ascertain from the Bureau of the Budget the relationship of the proposed legislation to the program of the President. A supplemental report will be furnished later in this connection.

Sincerely yours,

DANIEL F. CLEARY,  
*Chairman, War Claims Commission.*

FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY,  
*Washington, February 28, 1951.*

Hon. JOHN E. RANKIN,  
*Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
House of Representatives, Washington 25, D. C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This is in reply to your letter of January 17, 1951, requesting a report on H. R. 304, a bill to provide for a study of the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II.

The Federal Security Agency's interest in this bill is twofold. The Public Health Service administers an extensive medical research program including both the conduct of research and the making of grants therefor. Also, the medical staff and hospital facilities of the Public Health Service are, by arrangement with the Bureau of Employees' Compensation of the Department of Labor, made available for out-patient medical care and hospitalization to many of the civilian internees covered by the bill.

Research concerning malnutrition and its possible lasting effects is yielding today data of considerable medical importance. The additional intensified research which would be conducted pursuant to this bill would not only benefit the persons with whom the bill is immediately concerned but would add to the general store of useful and needed knowledge on the subject.

The research authorized by the bill can effectively be carried out through the Veterans' Administration which already has statutory authority and research staff and facilities for research in this field. The Public Health Service which has authority of a more general nature could be used to supplement the activities of the Veterans' Administration, as desired, particularly, perhaps, as respects civilian internees.

We believe it would be both unnecessary and undesirable for the War Claims Commission in carrying out H. R. 304 to set up in that Commission any research organization similar to that already maintained by the Veterans' Administration and the Public Health Service. We assume from testimony of that Commission before this committee last year on H. R. 8848, Eighty-first Congress, an identical bill, that neither the Commission nor the committee intends that this be done.

We therefore have no objection to the enactment of this bill. We are not able to make an accurate estimate of the cost of the bill, if enacted. Since the patients would need to be studied for many years, the cost would of necessity be considerable.

Time has not permitted us to obtain advice from the Bureau of the Budget as to the relationship of this bill to the program of the President.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN L. THURSTON,  
*Acting Administrator.*



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,  
Washington, March 13, 1951.

Hon. JOHN E. RANKIN,  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN RANKIN: This is in further reply to your letter requesting comments on H. R. 304, a bill to provide for a study of the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II. The study would be made by the War Claims Commission with the assistance and cooperation of the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs. The bill directs that the Commission shall conduct research for the purpose of determining, among other things, standards to be applied in evaluating claims of American civilian and military personnel based upon the physical and mental sequelae of the conditions of their imprisonment.

The proposed legislation, insofar as it concerns captured military personnel or prisoners of war, does not affect functions now performed by this Department.

At the present time, the Bureau of Employees' Compensation of the Department adjudicates claims of civilian American citizens or their dependents who are eligible under section 5 (f) of the War Claims Act to receive benefits for injury, disability, or death resulting from injuries occurring while such persons were held by or in hiding from the Japanese enemy in territories of the United States attacked or invaded by the Japanese. These benefits are payable from the War Claims Fund upon certification of the Secretary of Labor. The research activities proposed by H. R. 304 include the determination of standards to be applied for the evaluation of claims which may be filed under future legislation by civilian internees, as well as military personnel, in connection with their imprisonment by enemies of the United States during World War II.

Since the Department of Labor has the responsibility under the War Claims Act of evaluating certain claims of American civilians arising out of internment, I assume that the Department would have a part in studying and determining standards which it may be called upon to apply.

The Bureau of the Budget advises that it has no objection to the submission of this report.

Yours very truly,

MAURICE J. TOBIN, *Secretary of Labor.*

VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION,  
Washington 25, D. C., March 1, 1951.

Hon. JOHN E. RANKIN,  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
House of Representatives, Washington 25, D. C.

DEAR MR. RANKIN: This will refer to your request for a report by the Veterans' Administration on H. R. 304, Eighty-second Congress, a bill to provide for a study of the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and starvation suffered by prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II. This bill is identical with H. R. 8848, Eighty-first Congress, on which the Veterans' Administration reported to your committee under date of June 26, 1950.

The text of the bill is as follows:

"That the War Claims Commission, with the assistance and cooperation of the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, shall inquire into and report to the Congress with respect to the mortality rate and the mental and physical sequelae of malnutrition and imprisonment sustained by members of the Armed Forces of the United States and civilian American citizens who were imprisoned by enemies of the United States during World War II. To this end the War Claims Commission is authorized and directed to make all necessary arrangements (including contracts, agreements, and so forth), for the conduct of research activities for the purpose of determining—

"(1) The procedures and standards to be applied in the diagnosis of the mental and physical condition of former prisoners of war;

"(2) The life expectancy of former prisoners of war;

"(3) Whether there is evidence to sustain a conclusive presumption of service connection in favor of former prisoners of war for purpose of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities; and

"(4) Standards to be applied, for the evaluation of claims of American civilian and military personnel based upon the physical and mental sequelae

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of the conditions of their imprisonment, in the event such claims are later made compensable."

The proposal, in the bill, though more expansive in scope, is apparently related to a suggestion of the War Claims Commission in its report to the Eighty-first Congress (H. Doc. No. 580, p. 56) that a study along these lines be conducted by the Department of Medicine and Surgery of the Veterans' Administration. Such suggestion read, in pertinent part:

"(a) *Veterans' Administration.*—It is recommended that the Department of Medicine and Surgery of the Veterans' Administration be directed to conduct or contract for a definitive study concerning the mental and physical sequelae of starvation and malnutrition among former American prisoners of war, including a study of their mortality rate for the 5 years following liberation. Such a study would serve (1) to dispel the difficulty and uncertainty of diagnosis presently surrounding these cases and provide definite information concerning the long-term effects of malnutrition and starvation, (2) to determine whether there is a decreased life expectancy as a result of long malnutrition and starvation, and (3) to determine whether, as frequently suggested, a conclusive presumption of service connection should be made in favor of former prisoners of war for purposes of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities."

The Veterans' Administration is aware of the prisoner-of-war question in respect to determination of service connection and the evaluation of disability and the special medical problems related thereto. The Department of Medicine and Surgery has continued its interest in the special medical problems concerning American and allied veterans who are former prisoners of war. The Department has recognized that these problems, in general, manifest themselves in the incidence of tropical diseases and certain psychiatric disorders, and in the immediate and possible long-term effects of malnutrition. Through the investigations and research studies already completed and those presently under way, medical information has been assembled on the present status of veterans who were subjected to prisoner-of-war experience, particularly those affected by tropical diseases. The investigations and research in which the Veterans' Administration has been engaged have included the group of veterans who were exposed to the risk of infection with tropical diseases, with special emphasis upon former prisoners of war.

The future effects of tropical diseases and malnutrition are slowly coming to light. Medical knowledge in these fields is expanding but must await the passage of time, and accumulation of additional data, including autopsy protocols, to arrive at more than speculation and hypothesis. Tropical disease and malnutrition, as large-scale medical problems, have fortunately been relatively unknown in the United States. Of the country's few medical experts in tropical disease and malnutrition, a substantial proportion are associated with the Department of Medicine and Surgery of the Veterans' Administration as full-time staff members or as consultants. The research which has been and is being conducted, the diagnostic techniques employed, and the treatment methods followed in the areas of tropical disease and malnutrition are being conducted or supervised by these medical authorities. Future research studies are being planned by them, to be conducted when opportunities exist for scientific determination of the impairments and disabilities possibly due to tropical disease, malnutrition, or both.

The Veterans' Administration through the Department of Medicine and Surgery has instituted a method of identifying veterans treated in hospitals and out-patient clinics who are former prisoners of war. This will permit particular concentration upon the diseases and disabilities which might be related to prisoner of war experience. This method of identifying former prisoners of war will become effective in the near future, to continue on a permanent basis.

As bearing upon the subject field, and in addition to existing medical research projects in diseases which affect former prisoners of war plans have been developed for the following proposed research projects of the Veterans' Administration Department of Medicine and Surgery:

(a) Treatment of sprue and nutritional macrocytic anemia. Sprue and macrocytic anemia are conditions which have considerable nutritional etiology. This project is aimed at discovering causative factors and treatment of these conditions. Since both conditions may be found especially among starving or nutritionally deficient groups, this study may have profound significance in understanding conditions accompanying the following prisoner of war experience:

(b) Pilot studies of diseases of higher incidence (including parasites) in areas of operations during World War II: This project includes several facets for understanding diseases inherent in military operations during World War II, including

prisoner-of-war experience. It involves statistical studies to determine the incidence of diseases during the following such military operations or periods of imprisonment. The project includes studies of the factors causing or supplementing these diseases and studies designed to achieve greater understanding of the late sequelae, care, and treatment of such diseases of any origin, including those of bacterial, parasitic, nutritional, or metabolic causation.

(c) Determination of the role of psychogenic factors in the disability of veterans with tropical diseases and the role of tropical diseases in veterans with neurotic disabilities: Studies of the Canadian and British Governments of veterans who were prisoners of war indicate that there were numerous emotional and psychogenic factors involved. The study aims at elucidating this situation, with the hope that the relationship of the imprisonment to the veteran's late physical and mental condition can be clearly understood. Tropical diseases include those of parasitic, bacterial, and nutritional causation which are of high incidence in, or characteristic of, tropical climates.

Through its exchange arrangements with public and private medical research agencies, and its intensive review of medical literature, the Veterans' Administration keeps informed of the medical findings of other agencies in diseases and disabilities which may affect former prisoners of war. These agencies include the Division of Tropical Medicine of the United States Public Health Service, the Office of Naval Research of the United States Navy, the National Research Council, the Army Medical Department Research and Graduate School, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, and independent research efforts of civilian physicians interested in this problem.

In addition to the foregoing, the Veterans' Administration has been engaged in formulating and establishing protocols for a comprehensive study to determine the presence of, the causes, and the treatment of the symptoms exhibited by a number of former prisoners of war, including residuals of malnutrition, avitaminosis, and other conditions.

The claims program of the Veterans' Administration in cooperation with its medical and appellate programs have concerned themselves with the problems of the prisoner-of-war group since the demobilization. Each claim is adjudicated on the best available and procurable evidence. Regulations have been issued which direct Veterans' Administration personnel charged therewith to handle these cases equitably and liberally. Provision is made for priority of physical examination, and medical examiners are directed to report fully respecting manifestations which might relate to or result from prisoner-of-war experience. By way of illustration, the present instructions to examiners include the following significant directions:

"Neuropsychiatric examination will be accomplished in each case in special reference to manifestations of metabolic origin, neurasthenoid character, or other syndrome consequent to malnutrition, avitaminosis, exposure, or other circumstances under which the veteran was held as a POW. The examiners should feel a special obligation to ascertain and report any causes of reduced efficiency, whether or not expressible in formal diagnostic nomenclature. A common complaint is that although weight has been regained, weakness and fatigability continue. This should be reported on as accurately as possible. Retinitis is not uncommon following malnutrition. With history of intestinal disease, or unexplained, underweight condition, tests for intestinal parasites should be routine. The existence of any chronic disease which may be associated with the circumstances of imprisonment should be carefully checked and reported on." (R. & P. R. 1185 (B) (4).)

The bill proposes that research activities be conducted for the purpose of determining the life expectancy of former prisoners of war. In respect to studies of comparative longevity, it should be noted that comparisons of comparable groups would be required except for the particular variation being studied. Thus, in the first few years after a war, prisoners of war must be compared with other veterans, not with mortality tables based on civilian experience in the comparatively remote past. Such comparisons would be difficult and would have to be made on case studies of prisoner-of-war veterans and other veterans, preferably maintaining comparable prewar age and State distributions. Age rates would be needed for any such analysis and the mortality rate of older prisoners of war during 5 years following discharge could not be expected to give any indication of the death rate of younger prisoners of war. For example, it would be impossible to conclude at this time that the course of disability and mortality experience during the past 5 years for prisoners of war in the age 55-to-59-year group would be valid for the purpose of predicting the course for prisoners of war 30 to 34 years



old, 25 years hence, when they are 50 to 59 years of age. It may generally be noted that in considering even a preliminary approach to such a study the very feasibility thereof would require actuarial determination predicated upon detailed knowledge of individual records of survivors and deceased. Moreover, if such a study were feasible and capable of yielding valid and reliable data—and this appears to be very speculative in view of the nature of the subject statistical field—it would have to be on a long-range basis and continue for many years, well beyond the statutory life of the War Claims Commission.

The bill proposes the conduct of research for the purpose of determining whether there is evidence to sustain a conclusive presumption of service connection in favor of former prisoners of war for purposes of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities.

As previously indicated, a most liberal policy has been adopted by the Veterans' Administration in the adjudication of the prisoner-of-war cases and service connection for disability is granted even though under certain circumstances in prisoner-of-war cases such disability may manifest itself subsequent to the presumptive period otherwise provided. It should be pointed out that as individuals, veterans and nonveterans alike, advance in age, they become subject to the same diseases and causes of death. Thus, veterans who have been prisoners of war, combat veterans, other veterans, and the nonveterans, may expect to die of circulatory failure, cancer, and various degenerative diseases. To concede all these causes of disability and death, common to all groups, to prisoner-of-war service in a limited group, at least from the standpoint of existing indications and knowledge, could not be rationalized. Apart from the foregoing observations which suggest certain imponderables which would need to be considered and overcome in connection with this proposed item of research, there is the serious question whether a conclusive presumption of service connection in favor of prisoners of war solely for the purposes of hospitalization in Veterans' Administration facilities would establish a precedent for extending such presumption by law to other groups and other benefits.

In summary, it may be stated that existing standards and procedures of the Veterans' Administration permit liberal disposition of the claim of any former prisoner of war to hospitalization, out-patient treatment, and compensation benefits. As stated, investigation and research by the Veterans' Administration are continuing, including studies and analyses of the relationship of malnutrition from the standpoint of causes and disease which may manifest itself in the future. Personnel, facilities, and records required for this research as to veterans are available to the Veterans' Administration to a greater degree than any other agency of the Government. The utilization of these studies appears to be the primary responsibility of the Veterans' Administration. In connection with its research into the cases of veterans including those who were prisoners of war the Veterans' Administration could provide for such coordination as may be indicated with any agency which may be empowered to examine the case records of civilian internees confined generally under somewhat different conditions. In this connection if legislative provision for the study proposed by H. R. 8848 is considered desirable by the Congress, it would appear to be more advantageous to place the responsibility for the study with respect to former prisoners of war with the Veterans' Administration and in respect to former civilian internees with the United States Public Health Service, as it is understood that the War Claims Commission does not have comparable medical staff or facilities.

However, in view of the continuing and planned research activities of the Veterans' Administration, there is for serious consideration by the committee whether there exists any need or justification for legislation of this character with respect to matters affecting the benefit programs for veterans administered by this agency.

Because of the indeterminate factors involved, the Veterans' Administration is unable to make an estimate of the cost of the bill, if enacted.

Advice has been received from the Bureau of the Budget that it is the view of that office, since the Veterans' Administration is doing continuing work in this field and since other agencies have adequate statutory authority to assist in the conduct of studies of this sort, enactment of the proposed legislation is unnecessary.

Sincerely yours,

CARL R. GRAY, Jr., *Administrator.*